HQCA
Health Quality Council of Alberta

November 2004

Satisfaction with Health Care Services

A Survey of Albertans 2004

Survey Highlights

- **88%** of Albertans used the health care system in the past year, up from **83%** in 2003.
- **81%** rate the quality of health services received as excellent, very good or good, up from **74%** in 2003.
- **51%** of those who received health care services in Alberta in the past year are either satisfied or very satisfied with services they received.
- **45%** of Albertans who used the system say it was easy to access health care services, up from **42%** in 2003.
- **33%** of those interacting with the system are concerned about medical mistakes, an increase from **30%** in 2003.
- **13%** report they or a family member have experienced a medical mistake, similar to **14%** in 2003.
- **16%** of Albertans had a serious complaint about health care services they received in the past year, similar to **15%** in 2003.
- **64%** of the respondents are aware of Health Link; **77%** are satisfied with the service received.
- **65%** of those who received mental health services rate access as easy or very easy; **68%** were satisfied with the services received.

The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) believes it is important to establish ongoing, independent measures of Albertans' assessments of health quality, access, safety and service satisfaction based on their personal experiences. In October 2003, we released the results of our first survey. This benchmark survey assessed Albertans' general perceptions and actual experiences related to health quality, access, patient safety and satisfaction with specific health services, both province-wide and within each of the nine health regions.

The HQCA's 2004 follow-up survey aims to again measure Albertans' satisfaction with health care services in the province and within each of the nine health regions. It also compares the 2004 results with those obtained in 2003. In addition, the 2004 survey includes new health service areas such as mental health, the Alberta Health Link telephone line and the location of services received.

How was the survey done?

Ipsos-Reid, the independent research company that conducted the HQCA's 2003 survey, was again commissioned to do our 2004 survey. They conducted 4,608 telephone interviews with Albertans aged 18 years and older. The interviews took place between May 6 and June 18, 2004. Once again, respondents surveyed had interacted with the health care system within the past 12 months.

Interviews were stratified by the nine provincial health regions. Fifty per cent (50%) of the interviews within each health region were conducted with males and 50% with females. The margin of error for the province is ±1.44% 19 times out of 20. This compares to 2003 when a total of 4,004 telephone interviews were conducted between April 4 and 23, 2003 and the margin of error was ±1.55%.

How often do Albertans use the health care system?

The proportion of Albertans interacting with health care services remains high and has increased since one year ago. Eighty-eight per cent (88%) of respondents have interacted with Alberta's health care system within the past year, compared to 83% in 2003. The proportion of Albertans interacting with family doctors, diagnostic testing, hospital services, specialists and surgical services has also increased since 2003.

Interaction with Alberta Health Care Services

	2004	2003
Family doctors	68%	62%
MRIs, diagnostic tests, lab tests	42%	34%
*Community walk-in clinics	35%	N/A
Specialists	29%	26%
*Special therapy services	29%	N/A
Hospital services	28%	24%
Emergency room services	26%	26%
Health Link	23%	N/A
Surgical services	9%	7%
Mental health services	6%	N/A
*Home care services	5%	4%
*Long term care services	3%	3%

*Question wording differed from 2003.
N/A denotes trending not available.

What do Albertans say about the quality of health care services?

Eighty-one per cent (81%) of Albertans surveyed rated the quality of health care services they received in the past year as excellent, very good or good. This is up from 74% in 2003.

Are Albertans satisfied with the services they receive?

As a benchmark, 51% of Albertans were either very satisfied or satisfied with the health care services they received in the past year.

Those in excellent or very good health that have a family doctor are more likely to be satisfied with services received.

Overall, satisfaction levels with specific health care services have not changed significantly since 2003, except for family doctors where a higher proportion of Albertans expressed satisfaction in 2004 (84%) than in 2003 (81%). Satisfaction remains low for how complaints are handled (13%) and emergency room services (50%).

From the public's perspective, access is the key factor associated with overall satisfaction with health care services received. Other factors associated with satisfaction are:

- coordination of health care professionals' efforts;
- occurrence of serious complaints;
- concern about medical mistakes;
- having a personal family doctor.

These are also priority areas for improving Albertans' satisfaction with health care services. The following chart shows Albertan's satisfaction with specific health care service areas continues to vary widely.

Satisfaction with Health Care Services

Service Area	2004 (satisfied***)	2003 (satisfied***)
Lab tests	85%	81%
Family doctors	84%	81%
Diagnostic imaging (excluding MRI)	83%	N/A
Surgical services	80%	79%
Health Link	77%	N/A
MRIs	75%	N/A
Specialists	73%	68%
Hospital care (personally received)	69%	66%
Mental health services	68%	N/A
Hospital care (provided to family members)	61%	59%
Community walk-in clinics	59%	N/A
Home care for family members	54%	60%
Long term care for family members*	52%	60%
Emergency room services	50%	50%
Complaint handling**	13%	19%

*Due to the small sample size, the margin of error for 2004 is 8.99% and for 2003 was 10.76%; caution should be taken in interpreting these results.
**Percentage applies to those Albertans that lodged a complaint.
***% satisfied (4 and 5 out of 5).
N/A denotes trending not available.

The following shows the top factors influencing Albertans' satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with some of the most frequently used health care services.

Top Factors Influencing Satisfaction and/or Dissatisfaction with Services

	1	2	3	4
Family doctors	Doctor spending enough time with you	Doctor listening to your health concerns	Impact of doctor's care on your health and life	Thoroughness of exam
Walk-in clinics	Thoroughness of exam	Quality of care provided	Doctor spending enough time with you	Impact of clinic's care on your health and life
Emergency room services	Time between nurse's assessment and being seen by a doctor	Staff explaining reasons behind your placement in the wait to be treated	Amount of time between arriving in ER and being assessed by a nurse	Impact of ER care on your health and life
Specialists	Ultimate impact of specialist's treatment on your health and life	Being involved in decisions about treatment	Specialist listening to your health concerns	Specialist spending enough time with you during appointment
Lab tests	Amount of time it took to receive results	Clarity of test results to diagnose health problem	Thoroughness of testing to diagnose health problem	Amount of time it took to schedule tests
MRIs	Being kept up-to-date on status of wait for the test	Amount of time it took to schedule the test	Travel distance to receive the test	Amount of time it took to receive test results
Other diagnostic imaging	Amount of time it took to schedule the test	Being kept informed on status of wait for test	Amount of time it took to receive test results	Ultimate impact the test had upon your health and life
Hospital care (personally received)	Making sure follow-up care needed at hospital was provided	Courteous, sensitive and compassionate staff	Consistent hospital staff providing services	Understanding which health care provider was responsible for needed services
Hospital care (provided to a family member)	Needed health services provided within reasonable timeframe	Ultimate impact hospital care had upon your health and life	Providing adequate information about family member's condition and care	Consistent hospital staff providing services

Compared to 2003, several service attributes showed significant improvement in satisfaction. Throughout this report, we refer to "significantly" different results when statistically meaningful differences occur.

Satisfaction Measure

	2004*	2003*	% Change
Family Doctors			
The amount of time from booking the appointment to actually seeing your doctor	68	64	4+
Specialists			
The ultimate impact the specialist's treatment has had upon your health and life	70	64	6+
The amount of time you had to wait for the specialist to review any required test results	61	55	6+
Diagnostic Testing			
Being kept up-to-date on the status of your wait for the diagnostic test	62	57	5+
The distance you had to travel to receive the tests	80	75	5+
The clarity of the test results to diagnose your health problem	78	72	6+
The thoroughness of the testing to diagnose your health problem	82	77	5+
Hospital Services – Personally Received			
The hospital staff being courteous, sensitive and compassionate	80	72	8+
Receiving adequate information regarding your medical condition, hospital care or medications	73	63	10+
Understanding which health care provider was responsible for the services you needed while in the hospital	73	61	12+
Hospital Services – Close Family Member			
The hospital staff being courteous, sensitive and compassionate to your family member	73	66	7+

*% satisfied (4 and 5 out of 5).

There were also two significant negative changes this past year:

- A higher proportion of Albertans are concerned about medical mistakes (33% in 2004 versus 30% in 2003).
- A smaller proportion of Albertans rate their health as excellent or very good (58% in 2004 versus 61% in 2003).

What do Albertans say about access to health care services?

In 2004, 45% of Albertans surveyed say it was easy to access the health care services they actually received. This is up from 42% in 2003. Twenty-five per cent (25%) say it was difficult to access health care services, similar to the 26% reported in 2003. On average, Albertans say they reside approximately 20 minutes from health care services.

Similar to 2003, Albertans identified ease of finding a family doctor and access to emergency room services, hospitals, specialists and community walk-in clinics as keys factors in assessing overall ease of access to health care services. However, the ease of finding a family doctor is now nearly twice as important to overall accessibility. Access to emergency room services and hospitals is also more important to overall accessibility in 2004 than in 2003. These are all areas for prioritizing efforts to improve ease of access, which in turn will increase overall satisfaction levels.

As in 2003, ease of access varies greatly depending on the health service sought.

Access to Health Care Services

Service Area	2004 (easy to access)	2003 (easy to access)
Lab tests	85%	81%
Finding a family doctor	72%	69%
Diagnostic imaging (excluding MRI)	70%	N/A
Mental health services	65%	N/A
Community walk-in clinics	60%	N/A
Surgery received	58%	58%
Home care	56%	61%
Hospital services (personally received)	51%	52%
Emergency room services	49%	46%
MRIs	49%	N/A
Specialist services	47%	42%
Long term care for family members*	26%	39%

*Due to the small sample size, the margin of error for 2004 is 8.99% and for 2003 was 10.76%; caution should be taken in interpreting these results.
N/A denotes trending not available.

Where do Albertans access services?

When it comes to accessing health services, most Albertans received care in their own health regions.

Capital Health provides specialist and surgical services to its own region, as well as over 50% of the residents of East Central, Aspen and Northern Lights health regions. Calgary Health Region provides specialist and surgical services to up to 20% of the residents of other health regions.

Albertans surveyed also received most of their hospital services in their own health region (86%); however, between 25% and 50% of residents in East Central, Aspen and Northern Lights are also going to Capital. Calgary supplies up to 11% of hospital services to residents of other health regions.

Albertans Accessing Services in Their Own Health Regions

	% received in own health region
Diagnostic tests	92
Emergency room services	91
Hospital services	86
Specialists	83
Surgical services	82

105-05074/

In Brief

Diagnostic Testing

Access to diagnostic testing

	Easy	Difficult
Lab tests	85%	5%
Diagnostic imaging	70%	9%
MRI	49%	33%

Satisfaction with diagnostic testing

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Lab tests	85%	4%
Diagnostic imaging	83%	5%
MRI	75%	13%

While access to lab tests and diagnostic imaging other than MRIs is rated easier than for most other health care services evaluated, access to MRIs ranks relatively low.

When it comes to satisfaction with diagnostic testing service attributes, Albertans are less satisfied with timeliness issues like the amount of time it took to receive test results and the amount of time it took to schedule the tests. There have been significant improvements in satisfaction in certain areas such as the distance required to travel to receive tests (80% in 2004; 75% in 2003); the thoroughness of the testing to diagnose the problem (82% in 2004; 77% in 2003); and the clarity of the test results to diagnose the problem (78% in 2004; 72% in 2003). Albertans are less satisfied with being kept up-to-date on the wait status for diagnostic tests, although satisfaction has improved significantly (62% in 2004; 57% in 2003).

Family Doctors

Overall satisfaction with family doctors

	2004	2003
Satisfied	84%	81%
Dissatisfied	5%	5%

Seventy-two per cent (72%) of Albertans with a family doctor say it was easy to find one. This is up from 69% one year ago. However, it has become more difficult to find a doctor in the recent past. Those that have been with their family doctor for less than three years (28%) are more likely to say it was difficult to find their present family doctor compared to those that have been with their family doctor for more than 10 years (5%). Similar to last year, Albertans say the main reason they can't find a family doctor is a shortage of family doctors or an inability to find one that is accepting new patients.

Like last year, satisfaction with family doctors continues to be highly rated on many aspects of service examined such as being treated with courtesy and respect (94%), explaining things in a way that patients can understand (91%), and knowledge and competence (90%). Satisfaction is still low for the amount of time it took from booking the appointment to actually seeing your doctor (68%), although it has improved significantly since 2003 (64%). Satisfaction also remains low for time spent in the waiting room before seeing your doctor (59%).

Community Walk-in Clinics

Access to community walk-in clinics

Easy	60%
Difficult	14%

Satisfaction with community walk-in clinics

Satisfied	59%
Dissatisfied	14%

Community walk-in clinics provided service to 35% of Albertans this year. Unlike 2003, this year's survey confirmed people's interaction with community walk-in clinics by defining them for respondents. For this survey, community walk-in clinics are defined as places where people can walk in any time and see any available doctor, no appointment is necessary, and it is not an emergency department.

Most Albertans (84%) have a personal family doctor. They use community walk-in clinics if they need help after their doctor's hours (33%), if they were unable to schedule an appointment with their doctor (32%), or if it was more convenient to get help from a clinic (19%).

Of those who visited a community walk-in clinic within the past year and have a personal family doctor, 27% say their family doctor works primarily at a community walk-in clinic.

In terms of both access to and satisfaction with all dimensions of service, community walk-in clinics are consistently rated lower than family doctors.

Emergency Room Services

Access to ER services

	2004	2003
Easy	49%	46%
Difficult	29%	31%

Satisfaction with ER services

	2004	2003
Satisfied	50%	50%
Dissatisfied	28%	27%

Twenty-six per cent (26%) of Albertans visited an emergency room for themselves or a close family member in the past year. Of this 26%, 91% accessed the services in their own health region. Compared to satisfaction with other health care service areas, Albertans' satisfaction with emergency room services is low, followed only by how complaints are handled.

Similar to 2003, the most important factors Albertans associate with satisfaction with emergency room services are the amount of time it took to see a doctor after a nurse's initial assessment and the emergency room staff explaining the reasons behind a patient's wait.

The severity of the health problem (57%) and limited hours in family doctor practices (40%) are the main reasons why Albertans go to emergency rooms.

Specialist Services

Access to specialist services

	2004	2003
Easy	47%	42%
Difficult	26%	36%

Satisfaction with specialist services

	2004	2003
Satisfied	73%	68%
Dissatisfied	12%	14%

Twenty-six per cent (26%) of Albertans surveyed received specialist services in the past year, up from 23% in 2003.

While 26% have received specialist services in the past year, 11% report having been referred to specialists and are still waiting to see them.

Those receiving specialist services this past year are least satisfied with the length of time they wait at specialists' offices before appointments (59% in 2004, similar to 57% in 2003). Albertans are also less satisfied with wait times for specialists to review results (61%), although this has improved significantly from 55% in 2003.

Seventy per cent (70%) of respondents are satisfied with the outcomes resulting from treatment, a significant improvement from 64% in 2003. Albertans are the most satisfied with the knowledge and competence of the specialists (86%) and being treated with courtesy and respect (85%).

Coordination of Care

Coordination of services

	2004
Excellent	16%
Very good	31%
Good	36%
Fair	13%
Poor	4%
Don't know	1%

Most Albertans continue to believe health care professionals are coordinating their efforts to best serve patient needs. Among those that received health care services from at least two separate areas, 83% described coordination as good, very good or excellent. This is unchanged from 2003. Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of Albertans who personally received hospital services and have a family doctor believe their family doctor was informed about the treatment received. This is up from 56% in 2003. Other services changed little between 2003 and 2004.

- 46% believe their family doctor was informed about emergency room services received (49% in 2003).
- 60% believe their family doctor was informed about specialist services received (59% in 2003).
- 83% believe their diagnostic test results are being passed on to family doctors (82% in 2003).

Patient Safety

Concern about medical mistakes

	2004	2003
Concerned	33%	30%
Not concerned	42%	45%

Experience with medical mistakes

	2004	2003
Yes	13%	14%
No	87%	85%

The proportion of Albertans concerned about medical mistakes occurring has increased in the past year (33%), although the proportion of those believing they or a family member experienced a medical mistake that resulted in serious harm such as death, disability or additional prolonged treatment within the past year remains virtually unchanged since 2003 at 13%. Albertans more likely to report they have experienced a medical mistake include those who have received special therapy services such as chiropractic services, massage therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy or speech therapy; gone to a community walk-in clinic; interacted with emergency room services; had or been waiting for an appointment with a specialist; and received or been waiting for diagnostic testing.

Complaints

Incidence of complaints

	2004	2003
Yes	16%	15%
No	84%	85%

Satisfaction with how complaints were handled

	2004	2003
Satisfied	13%	19%
Dissatisfied	62%	60%

Complaint handling remains a key factor that Albertans associate with overall satisfaction with the health care services they receive.

As in 2003, the majority of Albertans who communicated a complaint either verbally or in writing are dissatisfied with how it was handled and addressed. Forty-two per cent (42%) of those surveyed did not report their complaint to anyone. This has not changed from 2003 (41%). The number one reason Albertans gave for not reporting their complaint was they felt it wouldn't have done any good (38%). Overall, 33% of respondents said their complaints were related to accessibility issues such as long waiting lists or delays in treatment.

Regional Overview

Satisfaction with health care services and accessibility differs according to where Albertans live. All regions share low ratings for overall access (45%) and satisfaction (51%). And while all regions also share comparatively good ratings for access to and satisfaction with family doctors and lab tests, ratings for other services such as diagnostic imaging, mental health, specialists and surgical services vary widely across the province.

All nine regions shared comparatively high ratings for coordination of care (83% provincially). But they also shared a concern over medical mistakes (33% provincially) and a dissatisfaction with how complaints were handled (62% provincially).

Summary of Ratings Across Health Regions

	Medical Mistakes % Concerned	Having Complaints % Yes	Health Link % Aware	Coordination of Care % Excellent/ Very Good/Good
Alberta	33	16	64	83
1. Chinook	31	17	49 ↓(8)	85
2. Palliser	30	15	61	86
3. Calgary	34	16	59	81
4. David Thompson	31	12	62	85
5. East Central	36	21 ↑(3)	66	86
6. Capital	34	15	72 ↑(8)	83
7. Aspen	29	16	61	83
8. Peace Country	34	15	65	85
9. Northern Lights	34	22 ↑(5)	64	76 ↓(7)

↓ Where red arrows point downward, residents in that region express statistically significantly **lower scores** than at least 3 other health regions (the exact number of health regions is noted in parentheses).

↑ Where green arrows point upward, residents in that region express statistically significantly **higher scores** than at least 3 other health regions (the exact number of health regions is noted in parentheses).

Promoting world-class leadership in quality, safety and performance throughout Alberta's health system.
www.hqca.ca

Summary of Satisfaction and Accessibility Scores

	Overall Quality*		Overall Access	Overall Satisfaction	Family Doctors	Community Walk-in Clinics	ER Services	Specialists	Diagnostic Imaging	Lab Tests
Alberta		% Easy access	45		72	60	49	47	70	85
	81	% Satisfied		51	84	59	50	73	83	85
Regional Overview										
1. Chinook		% Easy access	47		78 ↑ (4)	54	51	49	70	86
	79	% Satisfied		52	87	59	48	79	77	85
2. Palliser		% Easy access	48		72	56	55	58	82 ↑ (5)	90
	82	% Satisfied		56 ↑ (3)	85	54	56	82 ↑ (3)	89	90
3. Calgary		% Easy access	44		69 ↓ (4)	60	42 ↓ (4)	42	70	85
	80	% Satisfied		49	82	62	40 ↓ (5)	76	81	82
4. David Thompson		% Easy access	52 ↑ (3)		79 ↑ (5)	62	58	54	69	83
	83	% Satisfied		54	88	69 ↑ (4)	66 ↑ (5)	77	85	85
5. East Central		% Easy access	44		75	54	63 ↑ (4)	57	68	87
	78	% Satisfied		53	87	58	59	74	81	93 ↑ (6)
6. Capital		% Easy access	46		73	59	47	47	72	84
	84 ↑ (6)	% Satisfied		52	85	53 ↓ (3)	51	67	86	85
7. Aspen		% Easy access	43		76	56	59 ↑ (3)	46	72	87
	78	% Satisfied		50	83	51	61 ↑ (3)	69	84	85
8. Peace Country		% Easy access	44		70	67	50	54	63	81
	76	% Satisfied		48	83	71 ↑ (4)	52	76	84	87
9. Northern Lights		% Easy access	33 ↓ (8)		49 ↓ (8)	50	38 ↓ (6)	34 ↓ (6)	51 ↓ (7)	88
	73 ↓ (5)	% Satisfied		43 ↓ (5)	79 ↓ (4)	49	46 ↓ (3)	68	67 ↓ (7)	86

* Percentage total of good/very good/excellent ratings.

The HQCA thanks those Albertans that participated in this survey.

Want more details?

For a copy of the executive summary and technical report, go to **www.hqca.ca**. While you're visiting our Web site, sign up to receive updates of HQCA activities.

We'd like to hear from you.

1. How did you obtain your copy of this publication?

_____
_____
_____

2. Did you find the information in the survey useful? Yes___ No____

3. How could we improve future publications?

_____
_____
_____

4. What other topics would you like to see the HQCA focus on in the future?

_____
_____
_____

5. Other comments?

_____
_____
_____

Fax your comments to us at (403) 297-8258 or mail to:

Health Quality Council of Alberta
210, 811-14 Street NW
Calgary, AB T2N 2A4
Ph. (403) 297-8162

You can also email comments to info@hqca.ca. Thank you for completing and returning this questionnaire.

What's next?

Last year's survey established a benchmark for learning what Albertans' general perceptions and actual experiences were when it came to quality, access, patient safety and satisfaction with specific health services. As a result of the 2003 survey, the HQCA undertook additional targeted research on patient safety. This survey, which will be released in Winter 2005, focuses on Albertans' opinions and actual experiences with medical errors and safety issues in the health system. It also looks at Albertans' personal experience with preventable medical error.

The 2003 survey findings also prompted the HQCA to organize focus groups concerning complaint handling processes within Alberta's health care system, pushing the agenda for provincial standards for complaint handling processes.

The HQCA has established the Health Quality Network to bring the nine health regions, the Alberta Cancer Board, Alberta Health and Wellness, and the regulated health professions together to promote, enable and facilitate the improvement of the quality of health services in Alberta through leadership, collaboration and shared learning.

One year later, our 2004 survey continues to build on what we have learned. While the HQCA cannot make policy decisions, we can inform the stakeholders responsible for health care service delivery on the critical issues most important to the users of the system.

What is the Health Quality Council of Alberta?

The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) is an arm's length organization empowered and funded by the Government of Alberta through the Minister of Health and Wellness to report directly to Albertans on the quality, safety and performance of health services. The Council identifies best practices, and reviews and monitors the following dimensions of health care quality: access, acceptability, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and patient safety.